

TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

The old mail route between Plymouth and Boston ran through Tarkiln, where a kiln was once built to supply tar needed to caulk vessels in days when many shipyards were operating along Duxbury's shore. Mail was first carried by mounted runners, later by stagecoaches. One of the stops was at the 4 corners in Tarkiln. Here on a large oak, was nailed a box into which the stage-driver deposited mail for this section.

In early colonial days residents of the area also left letters and parcels at this "Tree of Knowledge," which was at the junction of the Massachusetts Bay Path (now Route 3) and the highway crossing Tinkertown. The Bay Path was the westerly route of the 2 King's Highways laid out shortly after the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies united. It connected Boston with Plymouth, cutting through Dor-

chester, Quincy, Weymouth Landing, West Scituate, Hanover, Pembroke, and West Duxbury. The easterly route, known as the Old Coast Rd., ran from Boston through Milton, Quincy, Weymouth, Hingham, Cohasset, Scituate, Marshfield, Duxbury, Kingston and Plymouth. The Duxbury road and the one through Tinkertown were laid out in 1763.

On May 12, 1775, the first Post Office was established at Plymouth by the Provincial Congress, with William Watson as Postmaster. Mounted mail carriers were making regular trips by June, and it was at this time that the oak is believed to have acquired the name "Tree of Knowledge." The mail box nailed on it was known for miles around.

First Riders

The first official joint post riders were Timothy Goodwin and Joseph Howland. In 1796 stagecoaches took over the assignment, making tri-weekly trips at first between Boston and Plymouth. Previously mail had been carried by sailing packets, and beginning in 1845, it was carried by rail between a line which began to operate between Boston and Plymouth.

According to one legend, the "Tree of Knowledge" was felled by lightning. According to another, the townspeople were negligent about taking care of it properly until an old man in Tarkiln told residents of a nightmare he had had in which

the spirit of the tree appeared and scolded the town for failing to pay due respect to the passing of the famous tree. The spirit, he said, threatened plague and other disasters, adding that the place would be forever cursed if the site of the tree was left unmarked. Next day a sign was erected. At the present time, and only once before during some other highway construction, has the site been unmarked.

The newest sign was painted by the late Fanny Burns Clark of South Duxbury. The granite marker placed on the site during the Duxbury Tercentenary celebration in 1937 uses the date 1774 accepting the story that the "Tree of Knowledge" was used as a mailing center before official mail service was arranged.

Wendell Phillips, descended from the famous orator, who lived in Duxbury all his life and who served as a selectman for about 20 years, wrote this poem about the famed tree (he was wrong in referring to "the first R.F.D." for the riders were paid):

A box they nailed on me,
Here was the Knowledge Tree,
Here, the first R.F.D.
This country using.
To me, the mail they brought,
Of me, their letters sought,
Great was the work I wrought,
Knowledge diffusing."

"See that thou mark'st the spot,
See that I'm not forgot,
Else cursed shall be thy lot."
The form then faded.